


THE
 Elders, Ministers, and Messengers,
 OF THE SEVERAL *England.*
 BAPTIST CHURCHES, *etc.*
 OF THE *Baptists*
 WESTERN ASSOCIATION,
 MEETING AT

<i>Plymouth-Dock,</i>	<i>Ycovil,</i>	<i>Grittleton,</i>	<i>Pithay, Bristol,</i>
<i>Bovey-Tracey,</i>	<i>Bridgwater,</i>	<i>Salisbury,</i>	<i>Lyme,</i>
<i>Bampton,</i>	<i>Froome,</i>	<i>Portsmouth,</i>	<i>Crocombe,</i>
<i>Prescott,</i>	<i>Paulton,</i>	<i>Wotton-Underedge,</i>	<i>Sodbury,</i>
<i>Wellington,</i>	<i>Crockerton,</i>	<i>Horsley,</i>	AND
<i>Hatch,</i>	<i>Bradford,</i>	<i>Cheltenham,</i>	<i>Bath.</i>
<i>Horsington,</i>	<i>Calne,</i>	<i>Broadmead, Bristol,</i>	

Having received LETTERS from

<i>Falmouth,</i>	<i>Exeter,</i>	<i>Upottery,</i>	 <i>Bratton,</i>
<i>Truro, and</i>	<i>Collumpton,</i>	<i>Loughwood,</i>	<i>Melksham,</i>
<i>Chacewater,</i>	<i>Tiverton,</i>	<i>Chard,</i>	<i>Thornbury,</i>
<i>Plymouth,</i>	<i>Stokegomer,</i>	<i>Beckington,</i>	<i>Winbourne.</i>
<i>Kingsbridge,</i>			

Being met in Association at FROME, *Somersetshire,*
 MAY 27 and 28, 1795.

To the Churches they represent send Christian salutation.

DEAR BRETHREN,

WE have once more associated in peace and comfort.

We feel it our duty to acknowledge this continued goodness of our God, and we bless him for it, in the hearing of all the Churches. We commemorate, we trust, with real gratitude, the advantages we have derived from it in former years, and particularly in the present, because, while discord and tumult reign all around us in the world, the Prince of Peace has been in the midst of our Assembly, and we have sat under his shadow with serene delight.

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But we know, Brethren, that our being so favoured is on your account, that measure of a spirit of prayer, that piety and profit in preaching and hearing, that pure joy in our spiritual songs, that harmony and love in our conferences, that reanimation in our communion with each other, which we have had is for your sakes; it is our earnest wish that you may reap the benefit of it all.

Brethren, as we are now come to the period of another religious year, is it not the least you can do in gratitude to the Divine Mercy, to pause for a moment and recollect its chief benefits; your religious privileges have been preserved complete, not by your care or your improvement of them, but intirely by sovereign and disinterested grace, this has opened to you the peaceful doors of your places of worship time after time: you have sat under your vines and your fig-trees, none daring to make you afraid, enjoying the pure and simple ordinances of Christ in peace; these have been preserved for your profit and joy, while other institutions venerated for their antiquity, and founded in the affectionate prejudices of millions of men have been overturned with irresistible violence, and swallowed up in destruction.

Let a faithful and grateful remembrance of this dwell upon your minds.

Yet this is not the only scene your heavenly Father calls you to contemplate;—no, he commands your attention, particularly to providences that have even surpris'd a world stupified with sin.

“ Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built up again. He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. He looseth the band of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle. He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged. He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death. He increaseth the nations and destroyeth

destroyeth them. He enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again. He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness where there is no way."

This, brethren, is a divine picture of the present work of God. A holy representation of that tempest in the ocean of providence, which produces the perturbation so visible in the minds of men around you, and the affecting changes that take place in their circumstances. We do not say, are your minds affected by the view? We are convinced they ought to be, but in what manner chiefly?—If the influence and spirit of the religion of Christ be neglected and forgotten in times of trouble and confusion, the consequence upon us, is, particularly unhappy, for like all the ministers of God, his providences are a favour of life unto life, or of death unto death.

It is thus we account for, the prevalence of the spirit of party and discontent among so many, who profess to believe a particular providence, and themselves to be strangers and pilgrims on earth.

Hence too, arise the frequent instances we have of the intoxication of politics, and this producing contention, hatred, revenge, and a degree of zeal or heat, which would be criminal, even in the indisputably just and worthy cause of God.

Hence too, it may be arises that uncommon degree of worldly mindedness, and the consequent indifference to, and formality in religious worship; that remarkable deficiency of a spirit of prayer, that neglect of experimental godliness and vital religion, that apparent ignorance, and in some cases contempt of a spiritual life, and a daily walk with God, which we can plainly perceive among an alarming number of the professors of Christianity.

Brethren, the height to which pride, lust, profaneness, infidelity, a publickly professed contempt of Christ, his word, and his ordinances have arisen in the world, is truly dreadful, greatly to be deplored, is to be prayed against, and strove against, with all your soul.

But to have the form of godliness, and at the same time to deny the power of it, is by far more dreadful, especially when God, as he does now rend the heavens, in order to reveal himself in some of his most awful and most impressive forms.

Ought it not to be the most earnest desire of your hearts to be *properly* affected? Ought you not even to fear, lest these awful providences should pass away before you are duly improved by them?

Thoughtfully notice them; the present dispensations of providence, as intended by God, eminently to improve your best interests.

The Holy One of Israel intends not his amusement, by pulling down one, and raising up another, by throwing confusion and death around you, in so many forms as you see. He can take no sport in your agitation and terror. You know he must have a purpose, agreeable to the holiness and dignity of his nature, agreeable to his grace in his promises, and his love in his Son.

Thoughtfully notice the present course of his hand, and you shall perceive by his conduct the faithfulness of that love he has so many ages professed and preserved to his church and people. This will gratefully dispose you to regard those instructions he is now giving you in his government of the world.

Brethren, thoughtfully notice him, at this juncture, and ye cannot but improve in the knowledge of him, and of Jesus whom he has sent; for by combining in your view, his word
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and his conduct you will find them explanatory of one another.

In his word, he has informed you, that he doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and that none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?

Observe and see in the world, in the present day, the extraordinary instances there are of the sovereignty of his dominions, and the continuance of his unlimited power. Attend to the awful scenery till it strike you with its full force, till your spirits feel a solemn agitation, and your bodies, if we may so speak, sympathise with them.

The Being whom we recommend you, in these events, to adore, has encouraged your best expectations by his word, in giving you the assurance, that your beloved Redeemer shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

Behold, through your eye of sense, he imparts vigour and respectability to your faith. He shakes terribly the earth, and loosens the deepest foundations of human error and pride; those favorite prejudices of mankind, that for ages have in the completest manner prevented the progress of the precious truths of the gospel. He tumbles them headlong, and with his great power they fall to the ground like the god of the Philistines before the Ark; and in the midst of these commotions, and it may be by these as the means, he re-animates the principle of divine love and philanthropy that has so long languished in the breasts of his people.

See, Brethren, what a concern, he has raised in the minds of Christians of various denominations for the everlasting welfare of man.

Observe what an ardor, he has communicated for the extension of the happy dominion of Jesus. Believers look abroad over the earth, to the west, and to the east, to the

south, and to the north, for conquests for their king; and though in circumstances directly averse to the spread of goodwill among men, and peace on earth, he permits neither the gigantic spirit of party and discord to stop their course, nor the furies of war to prevent their success.

Is not the set time for God to favour Zion, and accomplish his promises to his people drawing near? To Africa and the Indies, both East and West, where cruelty has sported with the blood of the inhabitants, and disseminated misery of every kind,—Lo, Britain conveys the light of the glorious gospel of the blessed God. Britain begins by her missionaries to open the way of eternal liberty and joy to the unhappy people who have so long groaned under bondage, and been strangers to the consolations which Christianity affords.

How must it revive your love toward a faithful God, and your confidence in him, to observe the distinguished regard, which he according to his antient promises, thus evidently discovers in the midst of the present confusion to that cause, in which your tenderest feelings, and your best wishes must be deeply interested; the cause of Christ, and of his Church.

It is soothing and fortifying to have the assurance of a particular providence, explicitly given in the bible. But it is perfecting the doctrine, it is changing faith into sight, and hope, into enjoyment to have this doctrine illustrated by facts. Observe then, God in his providence driving the proud from his lofty seat, laying the oppressor in the dust, and raising the injured with an irresistible energy from the midst of his calamities. The existing confusion serves but to make the doctrine more brilliant; for the narrow escapes from destruction, the remarkable deliverances, the pointed judgments, the immediate home thrusts that are made into the very bosom of iniquity, and the many instances of supernatural salvation, in the midst of danger, all join to convince in the most effectual manner the thoughtful and observing Christians,
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that, verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth; there is cause for believers, even now to exclaim, great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, O, thou King of Saints.

It is affecting indeed, to view in the holy scriptures, the representations made there of God's abhorrence of sin. The effects ascribed to it move every feeling heart. But now see those effects awfully taking place, and God shewing his detestation, not by his word only, but the sword of his justice also.

And are not these events to be considered by you, as admonition to godly sorrow, on the account of sin? How many thousands of immortal souls were the last year hurried into the eternal world; it is to be feared entirely unprepared, and before nature would in its usual course have terminated their state of probation and mortal existence! Hear ye not the cries of tens of thousands of orphans lamenting their want of fathers to provide for them, and protect them from the oppressions of a selfish world; and of widows mourning in secret in the remembrance of the loss of all that was dear to them on earth! May that God who has promised to be a Father to the fatherless, and the judge of the widow, pity them.— But the providence of God again signifies to us solemnly, that we are not yet sufficiently affected on the account of our sins against him, for the opening year reveals to us the continued powers of the Almighty, it threatens another deluge of human blood, and even a wider spread of this awful calamity.— Oh, if we have any bowels of compassion for others; if we have any fear of the anger of God ourselves, let us grieve; we are deeply concerned in these evils, each of us has personally added to the guilt of our nation, and of Europe, our sins are more aggravating in the eye of our God, than the sins of the unenlightened world.

We have, in thousands of instances neglected him, who has in a most discriminating manner been to us a God of
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love. We have been remarkably ungrateful, abundantly more than it is possible for the men of the world to be, and this to him who has been our long-suffering and unchangeable friend. We have many a time grieved the Spirit of our tender and faithful High Priest, even while he has been pleading his sufferings in our behalf. Let us seriously survey the detestableness of sin. Let us mourn at heart. Let us with the most affectionate penitence lament the prevalence of sin in ourselves, and in the world.

Let us observe the intercession of the servants of the Lord in ancient times, and have grace to imitate their sincere concern, their warm benevolence, and their earnest prayers in behalf of a sinful people.

Observe, brethren, the providence of God, teaching you in this affecting manner, the necessity, the suitableness, the present, the eternal importance of the blood of Christ, which alone cleanseth from all sin.

Shall God, thus, in his own solemn and majestic manner read to you by his dispensations his own comment upon his word, and you refuse your attention? Attend, you shall see every stroke of his providence spread an illuminating glory upon every sentence of his word. You shall improve in a knowledge of his greatness, and your own insignificance; you shall feel more than common your need of his favour and protection, through the merits of your Redeemer, to stay yourselves upon him, and in the midst of this mighty swell of human calamity, your souls shall be kept in peace.

But, beware, brethren, of incapacitating yourselves, for this thoughtful observation of God's providence.

This you will do by letting worldly subjects have too great an ascendancy in your thoughts and affections, and thus indispose your souls, for the rich and important instructions your heavenly Father is now affording you.

Besides, if you look only with an eye of sense at present things, the view will irritate and confound you, and thus incapacitate

capacitate for that calm and religious thought, and observation necessary to enable you to perceive your God in them, and hear what he speaks by them.

It is true, the circumstances of the day are interesting ; but therefore, you are in the greater danger of being led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ, and of setting your affections on earthly things. As citizens of the world, we cannot entirely disregard its circumstances, as members of society, we should not be insensible to its general state ; but our danger, as disciples of Christ, does not lie on this side, but entirely on the other.

Are these things to have our chief concern ? Are our principal thoughts to be employed, our best powers exerted in a cause which we cannot study, without being bewildered, in which we cannot be zealously affected without injuring our tempers and the interest of our souls, and which none can enjoy but for a very short and uncertain time ?

Brethren, beware, the world will always vary the form of its pretensions to your affectionate regard, according to the changes that take place in God's providence and your circumstances ; but it is the world still.

Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. Without this, your affections will be inevitably carried away from what would improve your will, and mingle with what tends to produce carnality, darkness and pain.

Besides, Christian prudence is particularly in the present day, essential to the peace of your families, to consistency with the religion of Christ in the eye of the world, to the credit and peace of the church : to which you belong, and to the removal of the many severe and unqualified reflections that are now so frequently thrown upon you as Dissenters ; and this is the will of God, that by innocence and prudence, you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

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But, as an important part of this Christian prudence, observe constantly and sincerely what effect things around you and particularly the part you take in them, have upon the state and temper of your minds.

Do they tinge your opinions with severity, render you incapable of the sincere and disinterested benevolence of the gospel, work in you any measure of the bigotry of party, and subject you to the charge of the blindness of prejudice? Do they raise a turbulence in your passions, and make them like the troubled sea, casting up mire and dirt?

Of things which have such effects upon you, the gospel warns you, and Christian prudence requires you to avoid them.

Do they hinder your spiritual and personal intercourse with God, and make you forget the pleasures that are at his right hand? Do they destroy your dependence upon his preserving grace, indispose you to religious experience, interrupt your family worship, make you satisfied with the form of godliness only, make prayer a burden, and the various calls you have to it from the church, and particularly from your heavenly Father, waiting for you in secret, more and more unpleasant?

A real Christian cannot be insensible of what would be his greatest prudence, with respect to things that have so dreadful an influence upon him.

Do they lead you to forget experimental religion and cause your desires of a growth in grace to languish? Do they by giving fresh strength to your remaining depravity, not only prevent your affections aspiring to things above, but really destroy that holy anxiety for increasing regard and conformity to them, which is absolutely essential to improvement in the divine life?

Brethren, as you regard the salvation of your souls, shun that which is attended with such dreadful consequences.

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Again, do they destroy that serene resignation to the will of God in the government of the world, which is the glory of the Christian religion? Do they in any measure deprive you of the *soothing and cheering* influence of the doctrine? Do they thus oppose you, all weakness and ignorance as you are, to every prejudice and error in this dark and ever changing world? No one of you we trust is willing to be thus deprived of his most solid privileges.

Let it therefore be your affectionate desire and endeavour, that your conduct among men may be such as shall through all sufficient grace, realize best in yourselves, and honour most in the world, the religion you profess.

Calmness, modesty and caution, and especially upon political subjects, are eminently necessary to this in the present day; you have no need to think your interference in such matters very important, unless you conceive the head of your religion to be no more than a man; but if you believe that in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, there is no occasion for you to tremble.

Be determined therefore to have nothing more to do with the world, in any form than God evidently calls you to by his providence, and He never speaks obscurely upon the subject of duty.

Let the Spirit of Christ dwell richly in you, that whatsoever you do, you may do simply to the glory of God; this will be always for the good of man. Beware Christians too of mistaking your pride for principle, and your prejudice for conscience; by this some are led on in a career of political enthusiasm, in which the true spirit of the gospel, the innocence and amiableness of the consistent Christian are lost; such a mistake is the more to be dreaded, as it is possible for those under it to be so deluded, as to think they are verily doing God service, and that he calls them to rectify every thing they think is wrong around them, when it
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is plain by his word, that he calls them to be quiet, and mind their own business, and to shew out of a good conversation their works with meekness of wisdom.

If we have complaints to make of the conduct of our fellow-creatures, or of our circumstances in the world, it is Christian prudence to make them to God, rather than to man; in doing this we come to the main spring of the vast machine of Providence, in coming to God; we are encouraged to expect firmly every thing necessary to our real advantage, and every direction and assistance to make us truly useful; God will give more to our prayers than to our officious zeal in such matters.

Brethren, it is Christian prudence to recollect frequently, that you are not yet come to the rest and inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you, considering your present life, as your state of minority in which your regimen is prescribed, and your exercises appointed by Him who is training you up for better enjoyments than what this world is capable of affording you. It will therefore be prudence indeed in you, cheerfully to aim at improvement suitable to such a glorious hope, by every lesson that is now set before you by God, and to improve the more, the more affecting those lessons may be.

Brethren, it would be your highest wisdom, and nothing you can do would tend more to the keeping of your garments unspotted from the world, than your turning every idea, every circumstance that impresses you into a petition to God, and ye would not find so many things to disturb you in your future life, as ye have in your past; the adversary of your souls would not harass you hereafter, as he has heretofore, were he always to find you made this use of his temptations, and through the grace that is in Christ, this would strengthen you daily for every thing you have to do or to suffer; it would season your thoughts, your schemes
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and your manners with true piety, you would increase in a relish for divine things, and consequently in the pleasures of them ; you could improve by all dispensations ; your tribulation would work patience, your patience experience, and your experience a hope, that maketh not ashamed in any situation or circumstance.

Finally Brethren, whatsoever things are true, are honest, are just, are pure, are lovely, are of good report ; if there be any virtue in them, if there be any praise belonging to them, think frequently on these things, and the God of peace shall always be with you, causing all things in his providence, every event of your lives, to work together for your everlasting good.

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE ASSOCIATION,

JOHN RYLAND, MODERATOR,

BREVIATES.

B R E V I A T E S.

WEDNESDAY afternoon May 27, 1795, met at THREE. Brother *Norman*, of Bampton, began in prayer. An accident on the road having detained brother *Ryland*, who had been appointed to preach the first sermon, we deferred choosing him Moderator till afterwards: and brother *Birt*, read the preliminary articles in his stead. Forty one letters from the Churches were then read: and brother *Cherry*, of Wellington, closed the meeting in prayer, about six o'clock.

After an hour's recess we met at brother *Sibree's* meeting, (Pastor of an Independent Church in Frome,) where brother *Birt*, prayed, and brother *Steadman*, of Broughton, preached from Psa. lxxxix. 15. and concluded in prayer.

Thursday 28, met at six in the morning, when our brethren *Breaker*, *Morgan*, *Ring*, *Price*, *Moseley*, *Thomas*, and *Duncombe* prayed. After which we attended to the business of the fund; receiving the annual subscriptions of most of the Churches; and distributing the same to some of the most aged Ministers, and others whose large families, scanty incomes, and activity in village preaching, claim our assistance. These distributions amounted to fifty three pounds, eleven shillings.

Half after TEN public worship began with singing, which was repeated at proper intervals, in all the services; brother *Saffery* prayed, and brother *Ryland* preached from 2 Cor. ii. 14. After which brother *Cherry* read the general letter, before all the congregation, and closed in prayer.—The members of the Association staid after the Assembly was dismissed, and unanimously agreed to receive the Church at Bath, under

under the care of brother *Porter*, into our connection, agreeable to their request by letter.

At THREE assembled again, when brother *Belcher*, of the Pithay, Bristol, began in prayer, and brother *Birt* preached from Psa. cii. 14. and closed in prayer.

At SEVEN in the evening brother *Hughes*, of Bristol, prayed, and brother *Taylor*, of Calne, preached from Mark, vi. 12. and concluded in prayer. When the auditory was dismissed, the members of the Association stopped, and approved of the Circular Letter, which the Moderator was desired to sign on behalf of the whole assembly.

Appointed the next Association to be held at EXETER, on the Wednesday and Thursday in the week after Whitfun-week, May 25, 26, 1796. The service to begin at THREE o'clock. Brother *Ryland* and brother *Gibbs* to preach, in case of failure brother *Francis* and brother *Birt*. Brother *Hughes* to draw up the General Letter.

Put up at the Bear, Southgate-street.

In the CHURCHES of this ASSOCIATION this year there were,

Baptized on a profession		Dead	75
of faith	88	Dismissed	19
Received by Letter	16	Excluded	11
	<hr/> 104		<hr/> 105
Diminished	- - - -		1

N. B. It was *resolved unanimously*, that as various inconveniences have been found to arise from the preparation of hot dinners, at these our annual Meetings, especially in detaining several persons from the public worship of God, who would gladly attend the same, we determine in future to have only cold provisions on these occasions.

JUST PUBLISHED,

Hearing the Voice of God's Rod ; and The Safety of True Penitents in a Time of public Calamity.—The Substance of two Sermons, preached at Broughton, in Hampshire, Feb. 28, 1794, and Feb. 24, 1795.

By WILLIAM STEADMAN.

Sold by Button and Thomas, in London; Fenley and Cottle, in Bristol; and Horsey, at Portsea.—Price 1s. 6d.

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